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# FIRECRACKER

## The Wild Bronco



M. and C.W. GAUSS





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# FIRECRACKER







*Sometimes a mountain lion would come*



# FIRECRACKER

## The Wild Bronco

*Marianne* By  
M. and C. W. GAUSS

Co-Author and Artist of  
Book of the Woods  
and  
Bang of the Diamond Tail



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## FIRECRACKER

**F**IRECRACKER was a wild bronco and he lived on a prairie dotted with yellow sunflowers. He played with other wild broncos, running and jumping together. They had no work to do.

Sometimes a mountain lion would come down from the mountain; but all the wild broncos would kick at him and make him run home.

One day, Firecracker was kicking up dirt and making a noise, "Nicker, nicker!" Suddenly he saw cowboys coming, with ropes on their saddles.

Firecracker jumped so high he kicked off a yellow sunflower. He ran, lickety-cut. The cowboys rode after him, galloping, galloping, trot, trot.



Soon a rope came over his head and fell around his legs, throwing him down on his side. Firecracker lay kicking on the prairie. He was very frightened as he did not know what would happen to him.

The cowboys said, "Let us take this wild bronco to the rodeo."

A rodeo is a show at which cowboys ride the wildest horses they can find.

The cowboys had many wild broncos. They drove Firecracker and all the others down a road, many miles, until they all came to Rodeo Park. They put all the wild broncos into a pen.

Next morning, people began coming to the rodeo, and each paid a dollar to see the show. Firecracker could get in for nothing but he did not want to go to the rodeo.







C. W. GAUSS

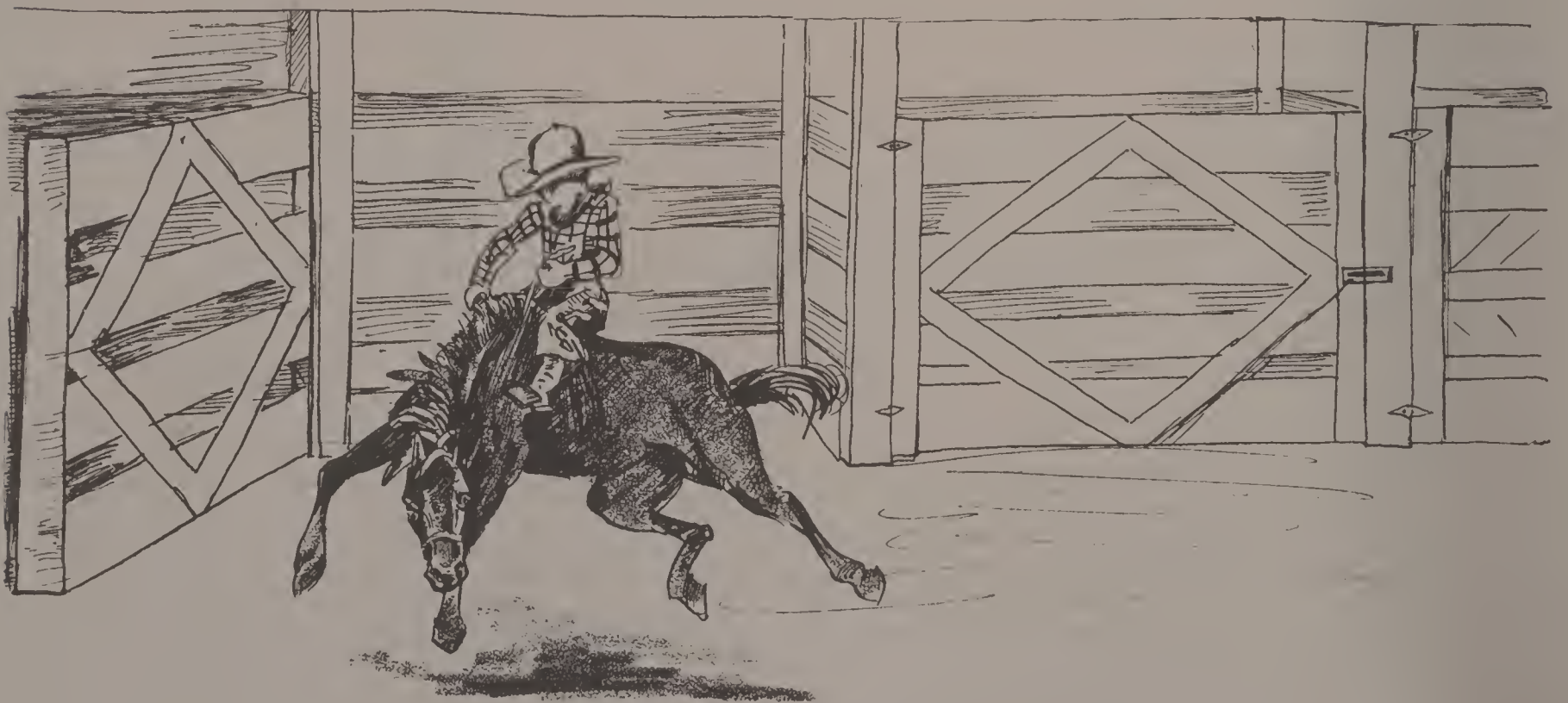
*But Firecracker threw Buster off*



A cowboy drove him into a narrow pen called a chute. By this time, the grandstand was filled with people. A man named Mr. Barker shouted: "Cowboy Buster is coming out of Chute Number Three on Firecracker."

Then Cowboy Buster got on Firecracker's back. A cowboy opened the gate of the chute, and Firecracker ran out with Buster on his back.

All the people cheered. This frightened Firecracker. He did not know what Buster meant to do to him; so he started bucking. His back went up and down—see-saw. Mr. Barker said any cowboy who could stay on might have the bronco. But Firecracker threw Buster off, then he ran and jumped over a fence.





Firecracker thought he would run home to his wild prairie and hide under the sunflowers. But the cowboys drove him into the chute again.

Many cowboys tried to ride him, but he threw them all into the dirt. People said, "What a fine show!" But Firecracker did not like the rodeo at all; he would never go to another rodeo if he could help it.

Ted was a very young cowboy, but he thought he could ride Firecracker. "I am afraid you will get hurt if you try to ride such a mean horse," Mr. Barker said.

"He is not mean, he is just frightened," answered Ted. So they let him get on Firecracker, in the chute. Then Mr. Barker called: "Ted White is coming out of Chute Number Three, on Firecracker."

Firecracker ran out before the grandstand. He started to buck, so Ted's sister Maud began to cry. But Ted was a good rider. He stayed on, and he talked softly to Firecracker. He said, "Don't be frightened, because I won't hurt you."

Finally Firecracker stopped bucking and went galloping around the fence. Then Mr. Barker said, "Ted White may have Firecracker for his own."

After the rodeo, Ted and his father and Maud came to look at Firecracker. "He is a pretty horse," said Maud.





“It is a good thing he is young. If a bronco runs wild until he is old no person can train him,” answered Mr. White.

They took Firecracker home to their cattle ranch. The ranch was on a mountain, far from the prairie and the sunflowers.

There Ted tried to ride his new horse. But Firecracker did not understand why any person wanted to get on his back. He kicked and bucked but Ted was kind to him and gave him nice things to eat. So at last Firecracker let Ted ride him.

Mr. White told Ted that he might ride Firecracker to the roundup. Ted rode all day with the other cowboys. They went into mountain canyons to find Mr. White's cattle. At last they came to a mountain river, and there they made camp.





*Then Ted woke up and patted him*



First Ted hobbled Firecracker. He tied his front legs together with a strip of burlap. If he had used a rope, it would have cut Firecracker's legs. Ted did not tie the burlap tight; Firecracker could take short steps, but he could not go far from camp.

The cowboys built a fire. They cooked bacon and boiled coffee and made flapjacks which they ate for supper. Firecracker went along the river and ate sweet grass for his supper.

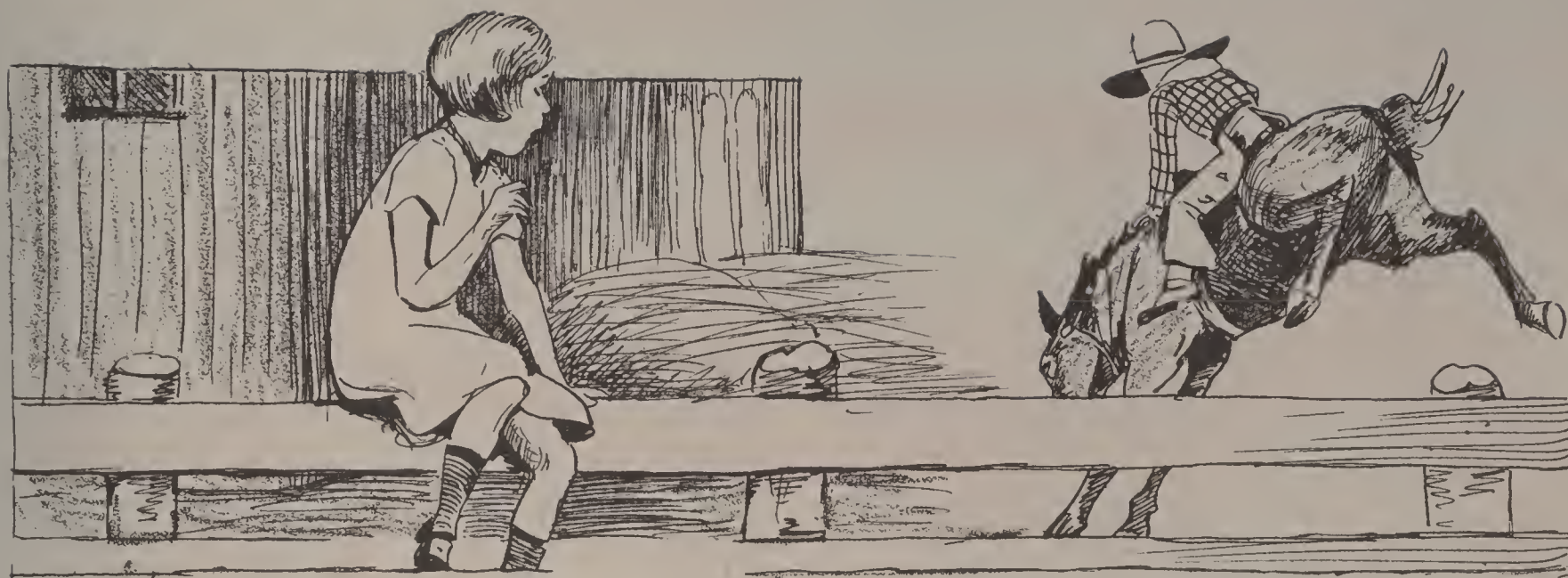
Soon he came to the edge of a black canyon. He heard a sound of some wild animal sneaking along the canyon, and it frightened him so that he hid behind a tree.

When he thought the wild animal had gone he again came out to eat grass. The sun went down. The camp fire went out. The cowboys lay on the ground with saddles for pillows. Soon they all were asleep.

The night was black and still. Something came out of the canyon and yelled, and all the wild cattle ran away to hide.

Firecracker knew what it was that yelled—a mountain lion. He stood still and his legs shook from fear. He did not know where the other horses were. The wind blew and he smelled the lion. He was more frightened than before.





At last Firecracker knew what to do. He hobbled to the place where the cowboys lay asleep, and put his nose on Ted's neck. Then Ted woke up and patted him and said, "Firecracker, don't be scared. I will take care of you."

After this, Ted and Firecracker were great friends. When they went home from the roundup, they had fine times together. Ted taught Firecracker a trick. He said, "Firecracker, when I dig in my heels you must buck."

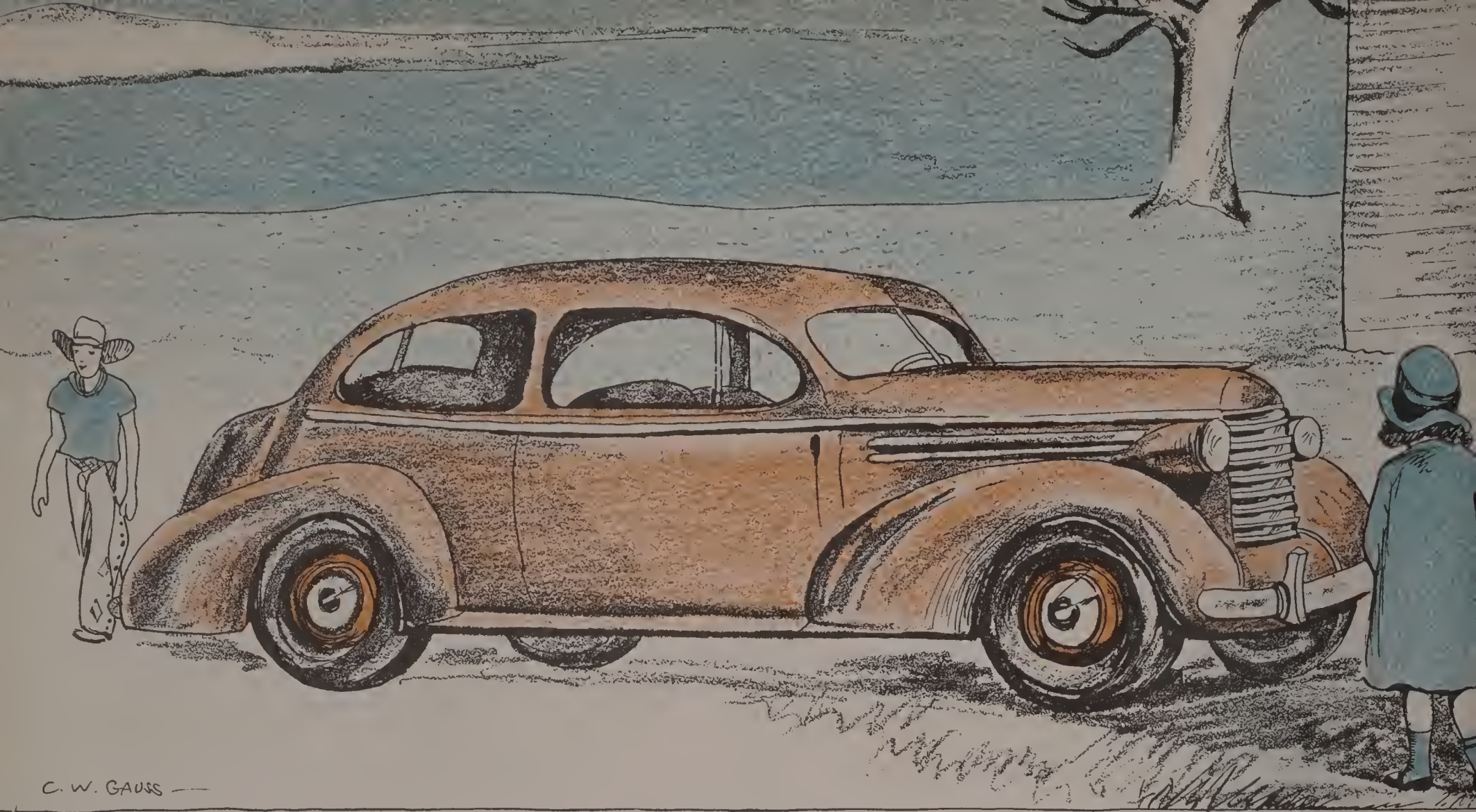
Firecracker did not understand words. But he learned to buck when Ted dug in his heels.

Ted had a rodeo in the corral. Maud sat on the fence, and they played it was a grandstand.

Maud said, "That is a mean horse."

Ted answered: "He is not mean, and I am going to keep him always."





“I am afraid you can’t,” said Maud, “I think we will soon move to the city, and then you cannot keep him.”

Just then, Mr. White came along.

Maud asked him: “Father, aren’t we going to move to the city and live in an apartment?”

“Yes, we are,” replied Mr. White.

Ted said, “I don’t care, if I may keep Firecracker.”

Maud laughed and said, “An apartment has about two rooms and a bath. Where would you keep a horse?”

Mr. White said, “I am sorry, Ted, but you will have to sell Firecracker.”





“Nicker, nicker,” said Firecracker as he put his nose into Ted’s hand. He would have felt very sad if he had understood.

Mr. White bought an automobile to take them all to the city. He put the automobile into the shed in the corral.

Firecracker did not like the noise it made as it came in, and he did not like the smell. He thought it smelled worse than a mountain lion, so he stayed as far away as he could.

A Mr. Berry came to ask if he could buy Firecracker. Ted felt sad, but he said, “I will have to sell him.”



So Mr. Berry paid Ted for the horse, but he said, "I will not take him now, I will come for him tomorrow."

When it grew dark, Ted came out to the corral and hugged Firecracker. He said: "Goodbye. I doubt if you will ever see me again."

Firecracker did not understand. He just said, "Nicker, nicker."

The next day, Mr. Berry came for his horse.

Ted caught Firecracker and put a bridle on him. Then he gave Mr. Berry the bridle and said sadly, "He is your horse now."

Mr. Berry had a truck in which to take Firecracker. Firecracker did not like the truck. Its large, round eyes looked mean to him, and he was sure it tried to bite him. So he kicked and squealed and did not want to get in the truck. But Mr. Berry made him.

Firecracker would rather walk than ride. He was glad when Mr. Berry let him get out. Mr. Berry put him into a big corral. There was a sign which said:

RIDING HORSES

\$1.00 AN HOUR

Mr. Berry's place was on an automobile road. Firecracker never had liked automobiles, so he did not like his new home. He stood by the corral fence and said, "Nicker, nicker!" He was calling Ted. But Ted was far away.





Soon a boy named Earl came to Mr. Berry, and gave him a dollar. He said, "I want to ride Firecracker."

Mr. Berry put a saddle on Firecracker and Earl got on his back. As they went out through the gate, Earl hit Firecracker with a stick. This hurt Firecracker, but as he was trying to be good, he did not cut up.

They went along a road until they met some cattle with long horns. Earl was frightened and dug his heels into Firecracker.

Firecracker thought this meant for him to buck as Ted had taught him. So he began to buck, and Earl screamed, "Help, help!"

He could not stay on a bucking horse. Soon he was thrown to the grass and hurt his knee. He said, "You are a mean horse, I shall tell your master on you." With that Firecracker ran away.





Firecracker did not understand. He thought a horse could have the master he loved. He thought the cattle ranch was still his home—so he ran there as fast as he could.

There Mr. Berry found him. He said, “You are a bad horse!” Then he whipped him with a switch. But Firecracker did not know what it was for.

Mr. Berry took him home to the big corral again.

Many boys tried to ride Firecracker, but they all dug in their heels and made Firecracker think they wanted him to buck. Each time he bucked, his rider would fall off. Each time this happened, his rider told Mr. Berry. Each time, Mr. Berry had to give the money back.

At last Mr. Berry said, “That horse is so mean nobody can ride him. He will have to be a pack pony.”

Pack ponies are the horses that have to carry heavy loads up mountain trails. No horse likes to be a pack pony.





G.W. GAUSS -

*Then he piled his things on the packsaddle*



One day, Earl and another boy came. They said, "We are going camping and we need a pack pony."

Mr. Berry was not at home but Mrs. Berry said, "You may take Firecracker if you can fix the pack on him."

Earl said, "I know all about fixing packs."

Mrs. Berry gave him the harness, the pack saddle and a nice soft blanket. So Earl began to make up the pack.

In packing a horse, men use a blanket to keep hard things from hurting the horse's back.

Earl was just bragging; he never had made a pack in his life. He did not know the blanket should go on first. He put the packsaddle on Firecracker; then he piled his things on the packsaddle. He took along a cot, a sheet-iron stove, and many pans and pots. Then he spread the blanket over the top.

"We need a bridle, to lead our pack pony," he said. He did not ask Mrs. Berry for one, but went and got a bridle with a very stiff bit.

When he thought all was ready, he jerked this bridle, and it hurt Firecracker's mouth. "Don't be lazy. Get up," cried Earl.

Firecracker could not help tossing his head. Earl said, "This pony is mean. He wants to cut up."



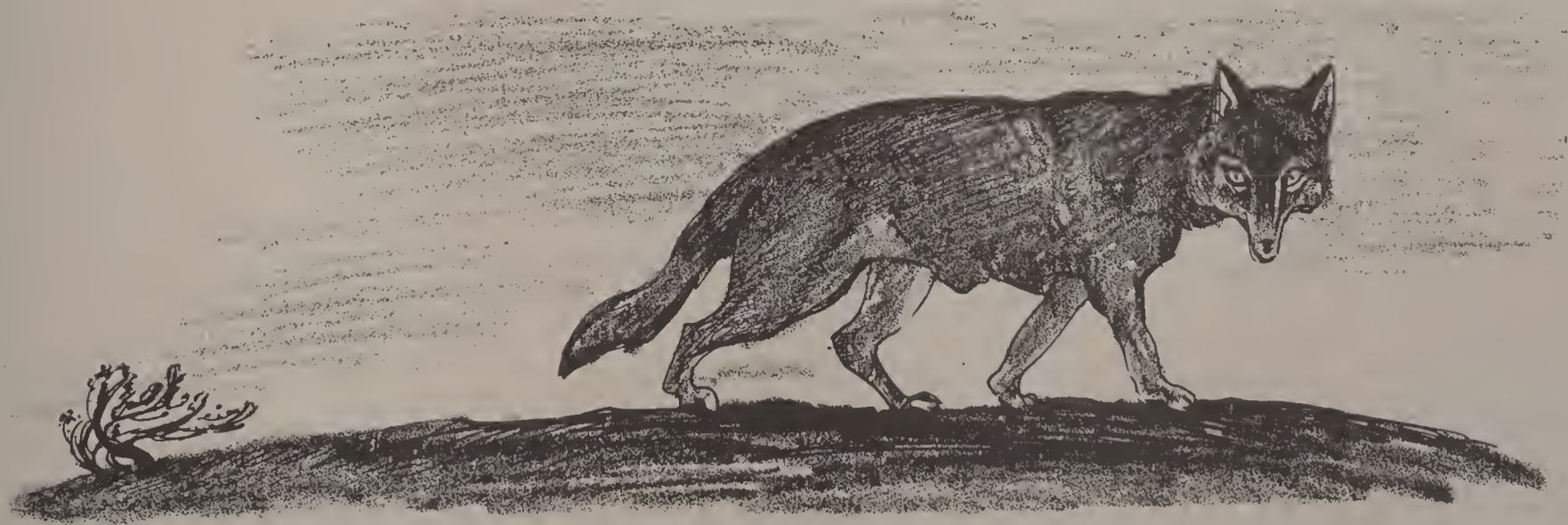
Earl rode a black horse and led Firecracker. He kept jerking the bridle, so Firecracker could not tell what Earl wanted him to do. Soon Firecracker's mouth was bleeding.

The boys rode up a mountain trail and dragged Firecracker along. At last they stopped near a spring with a stream flowing from it. They had a nice lunch of sandwiches and candy bars. The riding horses had oats and grass. But Firecracker's mouth was so sore he could not eat.

When the boys were ready to start on, Firecracker went to work again without his dinner.

"Let's go to the top of this wild mountain," said Earl to his companion.

They came to a rocky place, so steep a horse could hardly keep from slipping. A deer came out of the pine forest, a coyote trotted across the road.





Firecracker needed the soft blanket. Those sharp things he had to carry made sores on his back. The frying pan bruised his stomach. His mouth was still sore. He hung his head; and if he had been a person and not a horse, he would have cried.

They reached a level place. Earl said, "Let us make our horses go faster." The riding horses went galloping, galloping. And Earl jerked Firecracker, to make him gallop too.

Even when he walked, each step hurt Firecracker. When he had to gallop, with his heavy pack, he could not bear the pain. He pulled the bridle away from Earl and ran across a flat place called a mesa.

"Firecracker is the meanest horse in the world," said Earl. Then both boys chased him. Firecracker ran under some trees and scraped off his pack. The frying pan went into the river. The cot was broken. He could







*As it grew dark Firecracker was badly frightened*



run faster without his pack—but he slipped and hurt his leg. He limped up into a little gulch, and there the boys caught him.

Earl said, "Our bed is broken. Our cooking things are lost. We cannot camp, so we'll have to go home."

Both boys thought it would be best to tie Firecracker to a tree. Earl said, "We can leave him here and tell Mr. Berry to come and get him. But Mrs. Berry will have to give us our money back."

"I know all about making knots and tying horses," said Earl, as he tied Firecracker to a pine tree. "The harder a horse pulls the tighter my knot gets."

Firecracker had such a sore mouth he did not want to pull at the knot. Flies buzzed around the raw sores on his back, and he could not drive them away.

Chipmunks played about his feet. A spotted fawn came and looked at him. Soon the sun went down. The fawn ran home to its mother, the chipmunks ran home to their holes. Firecracker was lonely.

He looked down into the black canyon and heard the wild roar of the river. He saw the dark doorway of a cave where some wild animal lived.

As it grew dark Firecracker was badly frightened. He was all alone on the wild mountain. He could not run away. His leg was hurt so he could not kick.





Soon the evening wind blew and he smelled a mountain lion. It was time for mountain lions to come out, after sleeping all day. Firecracker snorted. He walked around and around the tree trying to get away, and his eyes looked fiery red.

The moon came up and made black shadows. It was night.

All the animals that slept in the daytime were getting up. Bats came out of caves where they had been sleeping. A porcupine came down out of a pine tree. Then Firecracker heard the yell of the mountain lion, and he knew she was getting up for the night.

Firecracker kept very still. Soon the lion leaped out of her black cave and stood on a rock. She looked like a common cat but was many times as large.

She could not smell as well as a dog or a wolf, so she did not know a horse was near. But she stood still, listening for sounds in the night.





The mountain lion kept turning her head around. Firecracker was so frightened he tried to break the rope that tied him. It was the kind of rope called by cowboys a lariat. A horse could not break a lariat.

Firecracker pulled at the lariat. He was so frightened he could not keep quiet, so he gave a loud whinny of fear. If Ted had been there to hear he would have come running to help.

The only one that heard was the lion. She jumped over a small tree and looked around. Firecracker tried to hide behind his pine tree.

One end of the lariat hung down and he happened to step on it. This frightened him more, and he started pulling.

Earl had bragged. He had said he knew how to make knots. But this one was not made right. If one end was pulled it would come untied.

The knot came untied, and Firecracker was loose.





Firecracker ran down the mountain and the lion chased him. His leg was still sore. The lariat hung down and nearly tripped him, but he ran on and on.

He had come to a wide mesa. Little bushes grew all over it, and the moonlight made them look white, like snow. Firecracker did not see the lion anywhere, so he thought she had gone away.

In the middle of the mesa was a tree. In the middle of the tree was something large and dark. It looked to Firecracker like a magpie's nest.

As he was not afraid of magpies, he started across the mesa.

He walked along a game trail that went toward the tree. A game trail is a trail made by wild animals.

But as Firecracker went along he did not see any coyotes, or packrats or other night animals. He might have known by this that they were all hiding from something.



When he was near the tree he stopped to look at the large dark thing in the middle. It did not look like a magpie's nest after all. He was not sure what it was. But he saw a long, thin rope hanging down. This moved back and forth.

At first, Firecracker thought the wind was blowing it. But there was no wind, so he knew it was moving itself. It was a tail. It was not a coyote's tail. It was not a deer's tail. Coyotes and deer did not climb trees.

He smelled lion. That rope hanging down was the mountain lion's tail. She had gone jumping over the mesa to head him off, and now she was waiting up in the tree.

Firecracker was more frightened than ever before in his life. He started to run. He ran on and on, and the lion jumped down and chased him. Soon he came to a river. He ran along the bank until he came to a ford.

A ford is a crossing where the water is not deep. Firecracker ran across the ford.

The lion had jumped across the river and was close behind him. Firecracker was lost on the mountain. He did not know which way to go. But he ran on and soon came to a road he remembered. He had once been here with Ted on his back.



He came to a place where Ted and the other cowboys once had camped.

From this camp, Firecracker knew the way to the cattle ranch. He ran and ran until he could see the cattle ranch. It was nearly morning and he was very tired.

The fence had fallen down, so he ran over it. The lion climbed a tree. She wanted to look around and see if there were people near.

Firecracker ran past a windmill where he used to drink. There was no water in the trough, and everything was quiet. He ran until he came to the corral.

The gate was open, so he ran in. He was so tired he had to lean against the shed.

By this time the lion felt sure no person lived at the ranch, so she jumped down and came across the fence.

Firecracker looked out of the corral. He saw the lion sneaking past the windmill. Then he saw her again close to the chicken house. He began to whinny in fear.

The ranch house was quite near the corral, its door opened and a boy ran out. The lion was in the dark by the chicken house. But the boy made a large flashlight shine into her eyes.



Then she was more frightened than Firecracker. She jumped over the chicken house and ran away.

“Hello, Firecracker,” called Ted as he ran to him. “We came home three days ago. Mother and Father did not like the apartment.”

Mr. White came running out. Ted cried, “Dad, my own horse came back.”

Mr. White said, “He is not your horse. You sold him.”

Ted answered, “I will give Mr. Berry’s money back.”

“But Mr. Berry does not have to sell Firecracker back to you. Tomorrow you must take him home.”

It grew light. Ted saw that Firecracker’s mouth was bleeding. He was angry about the sore places on Firecracker’s back.

Ted fixed a soft mash which did not hurt Firecracker’s mouth, and after breakfast Firecracker felt much better. Then Ted put a halter on him. But he would not get on a horse with a sore back. He rode another horse and led Firecracker all the way.

Firecracker did not know where they were going. But he felt that his troubles were over because he had found his own master.

Soon they came to Mr. Berry’s ranch.





*Then Ted put a halter on him*



Ted said, "I wish you would look at this horse. His back is sore. There is a bruise on his stomach. His mouth is bleeding."

"I see. The boys did not fix the pack right. They did not know any better," said Mr. Berry.

Ted answered, "They could learn better if they would try. Firecracker cannot understand, so I think the boys are the mean ones."

"That is true," said Mr. Berry. "But Firecracker cannot learn to do my work. I wish I could sell him."

Ted pulled the money from his pocket, "All right, you can sell him to me."

"Firecracker, you are my horse now," said Ted, joyfully.

Firecracker seemed to understand and he felt happy. He said, "Nicker, nicker!" Then he gladly went home to the cattle ranch with Ted.

Ted went on training Firecracker. Firecracker was no longer a wild bronco. He was a cowpony because he knew how to work. He could help Ted throw a calf. He could pull the rope just as tight as it ought to be.

Firecracker was a happy horse because he had a master who knew how horses felt.







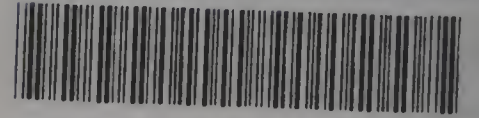








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